

Senate Bill 79

By: Senators Williams of the 19th, Pearson of the 51st, Rogers of the 21st, Goggans of the 7th, Heath of the 31st and others

AS PASSED

AN ACT

To amend Part 2 of Article 6 of Chapter 2 of Title 20 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to competencies and core curriculum for elementary and secondary students under the "Quality Basic Education Act," so as to provide for the offering of state funded high school courses in the History and Literature of the Old Testament Era and the History and Literature of the New Testament Era; to provide for the adoption of the curricula for such courses by the State Board of Education; to provide for reading materials, and methods of teaching in such courses; to provide for certain matters relating to the employment and assignment of teachers of such courses; to provide for the granting of academic credit for the successful completion of such courses; to provide for the monitoring of the content and teaching of such courses; to provide for related matters; to provide for an effective date; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA:

SECTION 1.

Part 2 of Article 6 of Chapter 2 of Title 20 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to competencies and core curriculum for elementary and secondary students under the "Quality Basic Education Act," is amended by adding at the end thereof a new Code section to read as follows:

"20-2-148.

(a) All public schools with grade nine or above may make available to eligible students in grades nine through 12 an elective course in the History and Literature of the Old Testament Era and an elective course in the History and Literature of the New Testament Era. The purpose of such courses shall be to accommodate the rights and desires of those teachers and students who wish to teach and study the Old and New Testaments and to familiarize students with the contents of the Old and New Testaments, the history recorded by the Old and New Testaments, the literary style and structure of the Old and New

Testaments, the customs and cultures of the peoples and societies recorded in the Old and New Testaments, and the influence of the Old and New Testaments upon law, history, government, literature, art, music, customs, morals, values, and culture.

(b)(1) No later than February 1, 2007, the State Board of Education shall adopt a curriculum for each course, including objectives, reading materials, and lesson plans, which has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of this subsection.

(2) The book or collection of books commonly known as the Old Testament shall be the basic text for the course in the History and Literature of the Old Testament Era, and the book or collection of books commonly known as the New Testament shall be the basic text for the course in the History and Literature of the New Testament Era. In addition, students may be assigned a range of reading materials for the courses, including selections from secular historical and cultural works and selections from other religious and cultural traditions. The courses shall familiarize students with the customs and cultures of the times and places referred to in the Old and New Testaments. The courses shall familiarize the students with the methods and tools of writing at the times the Old and New Testament books were written, the means by which they were preserved, the languages in which they were written and into which they were translated, and the historical and cultural events which led to the translation of the Old and New Testaments into the English language. The local board of education may recommend which version of the Old or New Testament may be used in the course; provided, however, that the teacher of the course shall not be required to adopt that recommendation but may use the recommended version or another version. No student shall be required to use one version as the sole text of the Old or New Testament. If a student desires to use as the basic text a different version of the Old or New Testament from that chosen by the local board of education or teacher, he or she shall be permitted to do so.

(3) The courses provided for in this Code section shall:

(A) Be taught in an objective and nondevotional manner with no attempt made to indoctrinate students as to either the truth or falsity of the biblical materials or texts from other religious or cultural traditions;

(B) Not include teaching of religious doctrine or sectarian interpretation of the Bible or of texts from other religious or cultural traditions; and

(C) Not disparage or encourage a commitment to a set of religious beliefs.

(c) The provisions of this chapter relating to personnel employed by local units of administration, including without limitation certification requirements, employment, and

supervision, shall apply to persons who teach the courses provided for in this Code section. In addition, no person shall be assigned to teach such courses based in whole or in part on any religious test, profession of faith or lack thereof, prior or present religious affiliation or lack of affiliation, or criteria involving particular beliefs or lack thereof about the Bible. Except for these requirements, the qualifications and training of teachers shall be determined by the local boards of education.

(d) On and after July 1, 2007, for the purpose of earning Carnegie unit curriculum credits at the high school level, satisfactory completion of the course in the History and Literature of the Old Testament Era shall be accepted by the State Board of Education for one-half unit of elective credit, and satisfactory completion of the course in the History and Literature of the New Testament Era shall be accepted by the State Board of Education for one-half unit of elective credit; provided, however, that such courses are taught in strict compliance with the requirements of this Code section.

(e) A local board of education may make such arrangements for monitoring the content and teaching of the course in the History and Literature of the Old Testament Era and the course in the History and Literature of the New Testament Era as it deems appropriate.

(f) Nothing in this Code section shall be construed to limit the authority of a local board of education to offer courses regarding the Old Testament or the New Testament that are not in compliance with this Code section; provided, however, that no state funds distributed pursuant to this article shall be expended in connection with such a course that does not meet the requirements of this Code section.

(g) Nothing in this Code section shall be construed to prohibit local boards of education from offering elective courses based upon the books of other religions or societies. In determining whether to offer such courses, the local board may consider various factors including, but not limited to, student and parent demand for such courses and the impact such books have had upon history and culture."

SECTION 2.

This Act shall become effective on July 1, 2006.

SECTION 3.

All laws and parts of laws in conflict with this Act are repealed.